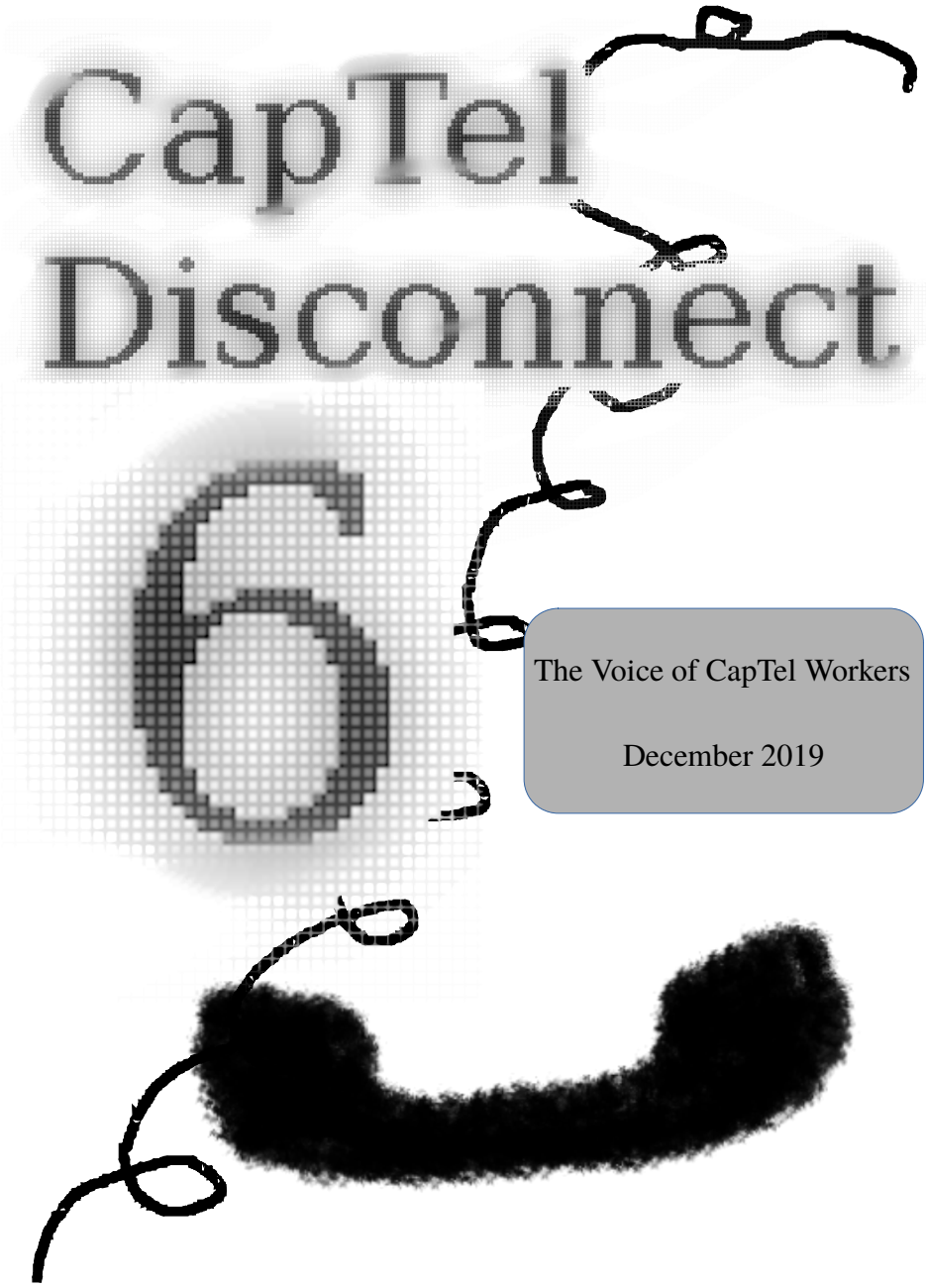
CapTel Disconnect



The Voice of CapTel Workers

December 2019

Our 5 Point Platform

Who We Are

We are CapTel workers who want to improve our jobs and working conditions. We have come together to win the following demands:

1. We Need Living Wages

We know that labor creates all wealth. It is our labor that generates tremendous profits for the company, and for our efforts we are paid exploitative wages. We deserve a greater share in the wealth that we produce through our work. We need “living wages which means a starting wage of at least $15/hour and an across the board $5/hour raise for all current CapTel workers.

2. We need The Tools To Do Our Jobs

We believe that CapTel is obligated to provide us with the tools to succesfully complete our jobs. Too often we are asked to work with broken or faulty equipment. Clients receive better service and worker morale improves when workers have functioning and dependable equipment. We need CapTel to invest in capital improvements and provide us with the proper tools to do our jobs.

3. We Need The Time To Do Our Jobs

We believe that CapTel is obligated to provide us with enough time to complete all of our non-captioning tasks as well as enough break time to satisfy our biological needs for rest and restrooms. This is not currently the case, and many of us struggle to maintain “adherence. We want CapTel to solve this problem by creating

more achievable adherence standards, by providing workers with longer breaks, and by generally increasing staffing.

4. We Need Affordable Transportation and Parking

We believe that CapTel is obligated to ensure that we have access to affordable transportation and parking. It is outrageous that so many of us are compelled to spend a significant share of our low wages on continually rising bus fares and parking rates. We want CapTel to take several steps to make transportation more affordable for us, such as subsidizing parking and bus fare costs, and providing incentives for employees to ride their bikes to work.

5. We Need To Be Treated With Fairness, Respect, Dignity, and to Have a Voice on the Job

We believe that all workers have a right to be treated with fairness, respect, and dignity on the job. While the nature of our work may seem robotic, we are indeed human beings. We have a right to be protected from dehumanizing company policies and from capricious abuse of authority. We should not be forced to simply carry out irrational and unjust mandates from above. Instead of being subject to arbitrary discipline, we should be guaranteed fair grievance procedures. We demand a voice on the job and transparency from the company.

What We Can Do

All of this can only be accomplished when the workers join together. By organizing our efforts through the CapTel Workers Union we will amplify our demands and take collective action to improve our working conditions.

The Boss is Not Your Friend, An Inside Joke

All day,
every day, spending the
spirit, watching the clock.
Meaningless muttering goes in and comes out,
processed, sanitized, for computer and client
consumption.

Chewing, digesting, regurgitating, starving to death,
cloistered in cubes, individuals deprived,
malnourished, starving to reclaim a tidbit of identity, a
pause between calls, crossing their legs until break, if
they can make it that long, hoping to find a friend in
the breakroom, bathroom, hallway, elevator, smoking
section, wherever, whoever, it doesn't matter anymore,
they've all but forgotten themselves.

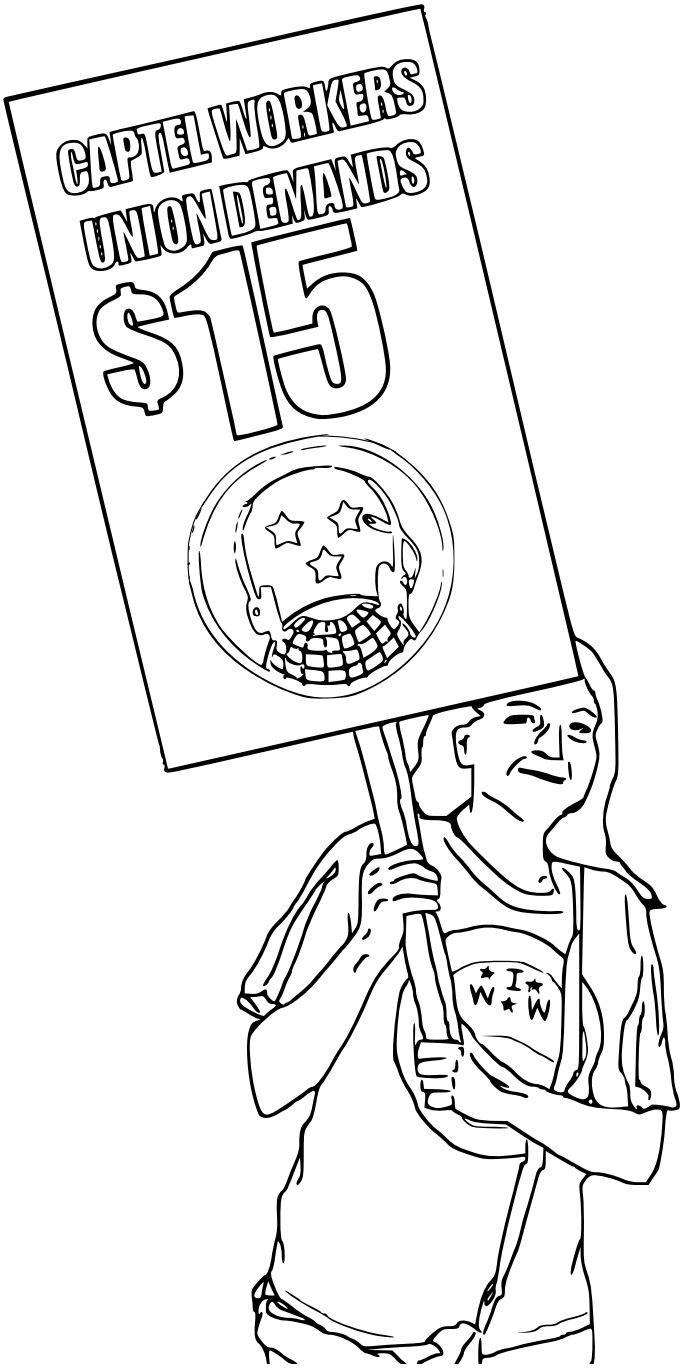
Then the person obligated by their position, the power
they assume, the first person all the prolies meet on their
very first day walks past, smiles, nods, says 'hi' and
mispronounces their name.

More important things to worry about, they tell
themselves, hundreds of captionists to keep track of,
perfectly forgivable, but then the floor operations
supervisor does the same thing, and a recruiter follows their
lead.

This is the Corporate Ego in action.

You see, everyone else knows who I am, stops to chat, shares
details of their personal lives, asks for advice, gives me a
greeting, a nod, save for a few who openly dislike me. And
nobody else, regardlessof their feelings, calls me by the wrong
title.

Only the boss does that.


CAPTEL WORKERS
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Trauma Floor

The Verge recently published an article called *"the Trauma Floor"* about the hidden lives of Facebook's content moderators, the folks who are responsible for reviewing the posts that Facebook users report to determine if they violate the site's policies.

The article is an expose of the austere working conditions at Cognizant, a third-party company that Facebook contracts with, and the brutal toll that the job takes on the content moderators' mental health and happiness. I was filled with horror while reading it by the oppressive and traumatic nature of the job until it dawned on me—Cognizant sounds exactly like CapTel.

Cognizant employees are forced to look at traumatic content all day long with no consideration for their mental well-being. Workers gradually become depressed or get roped into the weird conspiracy theories or far-right belief systems presented in the posts they endlessly review.

The article stressed how the time of the moderators is micromanaged, with the company allowing them only two fifteen-minute breaks and a half hour lunch during their shift and closely monitoring every minute of their time away from their cubicle. Cameras are everywhere to ensure constant supervision of employees and they are given monitors regularly during which a supervisor remotely watches their work.

People watch their coworkers go from being pleasant, well-adjusted people to conspiracy theorist crackpots and racist bigots

who wander the halls and mutter to each other about the earth being flat and using racial slurs, their minds slowly warped over time by the sheer deluge of vile content that flashes across their screen every day of their career with Cognizant. CapTel's content is not nearly so consistently putrid, of course, but every captionist has memories of terrible calls that they carry with them. Obviously, I can't list examples here but I remember calls that honestly shocked me when I heard them.

Our job is also very grinding in nature and even when not explicitly terrible the calls we caption have the tendency to make many of us focus on our own mortality. For someone who struggles with depression, even as relatively mild as my case is, this can easily lead to a preoccupation with death. I've found myself in some incredibly dark holes during my time at CapTel. Surrounded by three drab, undecorated cubicle walls and with nothing to distract me but my thoughts, the call content has often led me into a spiraling tailspin of seasonal depression.

The job that we do is one that pays poorly despite how taxing it can be. We caption calls that deal with death, poverty, heartache, and racism. We deserve a raise for the emotional labor that we do and for a myriad of other reasons.

We deserve to be paid more.

We staff a trauma floor.

CapTel Workers Union pickets CapTel for a living wage

A few months ago CapTel Workers Union demanded a company-wide raise in a march on the boss. We told the company that we would give them time to consider it but that we wanted an answer to be given in the next monthly team meeting. We argued that this decision would affect everyone in the workplace and that our coworkers deserve to hear if they are getting a raise or CapTel's explanation for why they don't believe their employees deserve an easily affordable wage increase. Instead, CapTel called a single union member into a secret meeting to tell her that they believe their wages are "competitive." We decided that if CapTel would not have open and honest communication with our coworkers that we would tell them ourselves. We decided to demonstrate with a picket.

We gathered in the plaza outside of the Blue (or the 310W, as it is being rebranded following the multi- million dollar building update that seems to have improved everything except the elevators). As the time of the picket approached our numbers steadily grew. More than seventy workers and supporters gathered and we distributed T-shirts and picket signs made by union members. We began chanting and marching through the plaza using some of the classic union chants as well as one written by a CapTel Workers Union member specifically for this event : "We are the voice, we are the power / We all demand 15

an hour!" Shortly after we had begun, police arrived and spoke with our designated police liaison. When asked if somebody had complained about us the police stated that CapTel admin had. However, despite what CapTel may wish, it is not illegal to protest low wages and police let us be.

Workers came out on their breaks to check out the picket, taking pamphlets and asking for CWU shirts which we happily gave to them. Some even dropped what they were doing to come march in the picket line with us. Drivers that were passing by beeped their horns in support and one woman rolled down her car window and yelled that CapTel "screwed her over" while she worked there and she was happy to see us demonstrating. Three picketers had planned speeches for this event and after hearing them speak other workers grabbed the megaphone and gave impromptu speeches, sharing their CapTel horror stories and their need for a living wage and a workplace that listens to its workers.

"...an incredibly empowering and overwhemlingly positive experience."

The picket was an incredibly empowering and overwhelmingly positive experience. It was amazing to see so many CapTel workers come out to stand up for themselves and their coworkers and to demonstrate their willingness to fight to improve their workplace. Workers shared their contact information with us and asked how they could become further involved.

CapTel Workers Union is going to continue to organize, demonstrate, and fight for living wages. We will win.

Sorry To Bother You! Review

Boots Riley's directorial debut Sorry To Bother You! was one of my favorite movies of 2018. The plot follows Cassius ("Cash" to his friends) Green as he works at a call center called RegalView, feeling torn between his loyalty to his work friends who are trying to unionize and the job security and chance for a promotion that comes with siding with the company.

It's a movie that I believe will instantly resonate with anyone who has worked at CapTel. As Cash enters Regalview's call floor on his first day on the job we see the all-too-familiar setup of drab gray cubicles, computer monitors, and headsets. The company has a team meeting where management prattles on and on about their employees being a team and a family. "Does that mean we're getting a raise?" asks an employee, which management responds to with forced laughter.

"...a power struggle that we all take part in on a daily basis, whether we know it or not."

One of the things that I love about Sorry To Bother You! is the way in which ordinary people are the heroes of the movie. When we watch the Hunger Games we all identify with Katniss and feel sure that we would stand up and fight back against an evil government like the Capitol. For most of us, our lives are closer to a Villager #7 than a Katniss.

Sorry To Bother You! forces you to consider what you would do because it is about a power struggle that we all take part in on a daily basis whether we know it or not. We all wake up and go to a job where we have no power despite being the ones who produce all profits for the company. We are not part of a team as we do not have a say in how the company is run or what our working conditions are. We are managed servants.

It doesn't have to be that way. Despite the position we are in now of being bullied and dictated to we actually have the ability to flip the power dynamic. If none of us showed up to work one day the administration would be in a

blind panic. They could get all of HR and the management team onto the phones and it would do nothing to stem the tide of lost profits and FCC fines that they would be facing. The company is ruined if we decide to act in a group and they don't meet our demands. To quote the famous union organizer and IWW member Big Bill Haywood “all the workers have to do is fold their hands behind their backs and they have the capitalist class whipped.”

This is an incredible amount of power. It just has to be seized by us as a group. This is where we have to make a choice. We can stand up for ourselves and with our coworkers or we can aid the boss, either through our apathy or by being actively anti-union. You can decide you want to fight for your coworkers to have better benefits, for single mothers to be able to afford Christmas presents, for your cubicle neighbor to be able to get that cavity filled, for the person you see every day in the break room to have food security.

Or you can decide to let things stay as they are while Rob Engelke shops for another yacht and lives a life of absurd luxury and greed that he has built for himself by paying low wages and keeping thousands of other people in near-poverty.

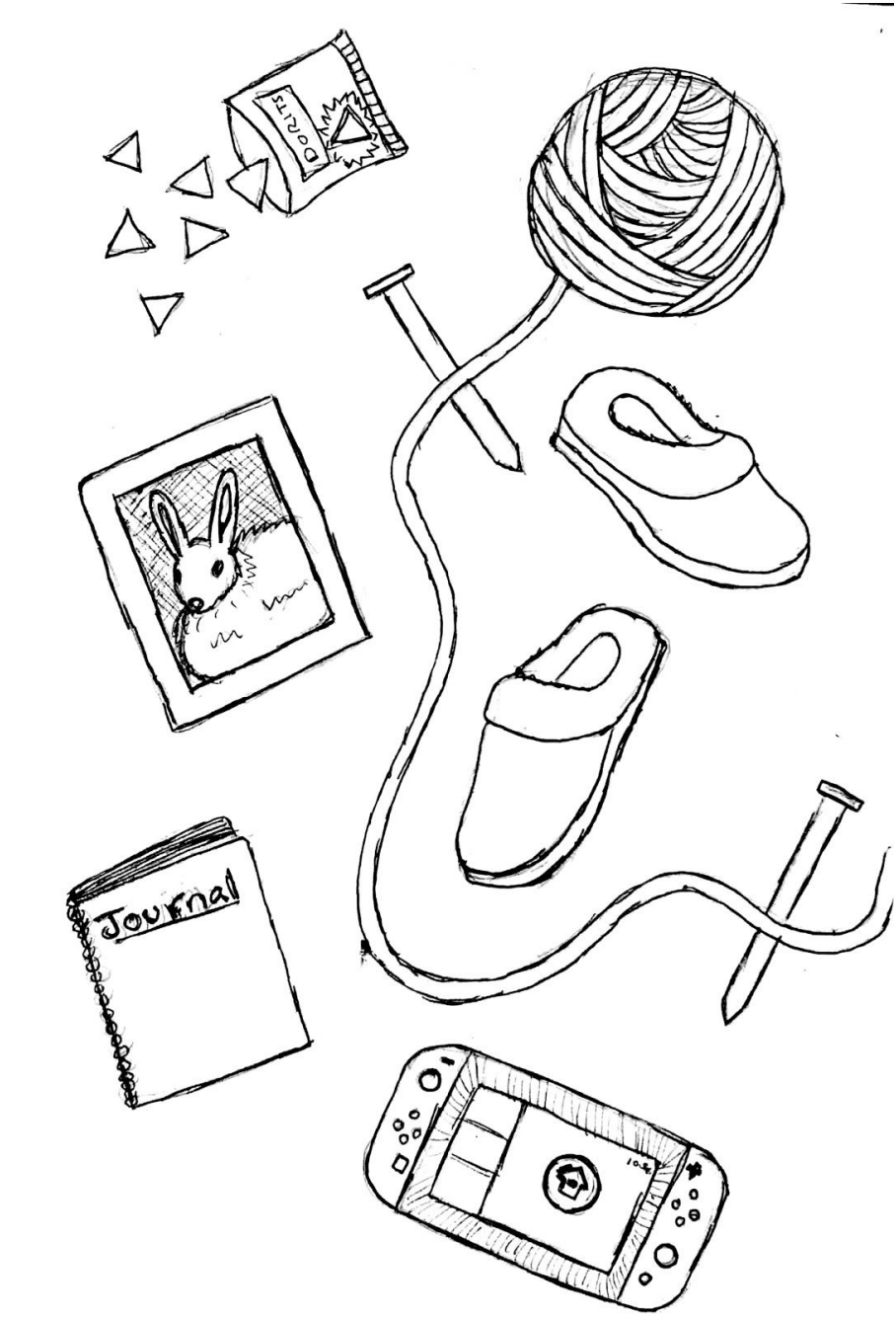
It's a battle between human dignity and the rich and powerful and it's one that you play a role in. To get involved in the right side of the fight contact the CapTel Workers Union and encourage your friends at work to do so as well. Maybe you can even host a Sorry To Bother You! movie night for your friends and talk with them about the importance of taking a stance in this fight for workplace democracy.

At one point in STBY! Cash begins to wonder “am I doing anything meaningful with my life?” He's stuck in a rut of spending nine hours a day watching a computer screen and that's a feeling we can all relate to. We have all watched minutes and hours of our lives tick away at work, wishing the time would go by faster, wishing away parts of our limited time here on earth. Cash eventually finds meaning in the fight to make his workplace better for himself and his coworkers. We can find that meaning too.

CapTel Survival Guide

Here are some things to consider bringing to the call floor:

- *Reading material*. A novel, a comic, or this zine! Something quick and not too heavy works best for frequent interruptions.
- *Other activities*. This could be anything from a craft project to a handheld gaming device. And the Nintendo Switch is call floor approved! Puzzles, coloring sheets, and notebooks are great. Write a journal or knit a sweater, and mix it up.
- *Moisturizer*. We're heading into the winter months!
- *Cushioning*. For your head. The headsets can feel brutal after a while.
- *A snack*. And a reusable water bottle, CapTel branded or not. On days where you don't have the time or energy to pack a full lunch, bringing a small snack that you like is still a great option.
- *Dress in layers*. The call floor's temperature is unpredictable! And while we're talking clothes: remember you have options as a CA. If you've never worn sweatpants on the call floor, I recommend having a comfy day at least once! It's nice.
- *A stuffed animal*...or a picture of your pet, or something else to brighten up your cubicle. It makes a big difference when you break up the gray.
- Lastly, *a union membership card*! Together, let's make CapTel better for all of us. In the meantime, rock your pajamas and take care of yourself.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